

THE ORGANIZER

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University Workers Speak.

Emily Kreitzer

"The Scab Punisher" • AFSCME 3800

I don't know that I ever 'decided' to go out on strike – I suppose it could be said that the decision was made for me when AFSCME declared a strike. I feel that working in a job that is represented by a union comes with a responsibility to honor not only the union, but also the individual people within that union. Crossing a picket line would dishonor not only the union, but every single member within it. To me, there is no decision to make. Striking is an obligation.

The first two weeks of the strike, I tried out a few different picket lines – none of which 'fit' for me (marching, chanting, making noise isn't my thing). The last week I picketed the loading docks. I'm not sure that anyone would say that picketing is fun, but for me focusing on the dock came with good company, it gave me the sense that there was a real feeling of solidarity with at least some AFSCME members at the U of M, and being at the loading docks you not only feel that you are making an impact, you can see it, which is very satisfying. I think the biggest reason I felt and stayed committed to picketing the docks is I felt welcome, felt like it made a difference, and felt like the presence of every picketer there was genuinely appreciated. It made me feel like the time, energy and personal commitment was well spent.

By far the best thing was meeting the people I met the last week of the strike.

Even though we 'lost', just having the opportunity to meet people who have convictions and are committed to making positive changes made the strike worthwhile. I think the strike ended the way it did because AFSCME has not done its job in making people aware of the union, each individual's role and responsibility to the union, or what the union does for each and every one of us. There is a really huge disconnect between the union and its members (especially fair-share members) and most AFSCME members within the University feel no connection or obligation to the union or their fellow union-members; therefore they did not honor the picket line. If a majority of a union's members will not stand behind the union, that doesn't leave the union with much bargaining power and strikes will end badly.

I think that an effort needs to be made to connect with each member on an individual level so every person knows the basics of what a union is and why it matters to them personally. Sending out periodic mass e-mails is fine, but the only way people will read the e-mails or care what they say is if they already feel a sense of personal connection and commitment to and from the union. I imagine it would be much harder to cross a picket line if you know and believe you are really hurting yourself. If this union can get every one of its members to walk off the job when a strike is declared, we might be taken seriously. If most members do not honor the picket line, the message the University, the me-

media and the general public get is that we ARE satisfied with our wages and strikers come across as petty, demanding and confrontational. It is a disservice to all involved to declare a strike without ensuring that EVERY avenue was pursued to get all members to walk off their jobs.

If the next contract brings about another strike, people need to be assigned to picket locations and shifts before the strike starts. People also need to feel like there will be a safety net provided by the union to cover basic living expenses for the duration of the strike. The single biggest reason I heard for crossing picket lines is "I can't afford to strike." Ensure all members in between contracts contribute to the Mutual Support Fund so the "I can't afford it" excuse will be unacceptable. Actively promoting full voting membership is also important; and once that happens, make it very easy and very clear where and how to vote. I haven't the faintest idea how to make any of this happen, but I believe it is critical that drastic changes are made in education, maintenance of relationships between members and union officials, and strike preparation and organization.

Jeff Pilacinski

AFSCME 3800 • IWW IU 620

I am a member of the clerical union, one of four AFSCME locals that struck. I'm also a Wobbly - an education worker in the IWW's Industrial Union 620. I went on strike because there were no other immediate, viable responses to the University's position. With the workforce divided along craft or trade lines and the employer taking advantage of these splits, it was critical for me to strike - to inhibit further division among co-workers and thus promote industrial organization and solidarity.

During the strike, I worked with others to organize picket lines at several load-



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THE ORGANIZER

A bi-monthly publication of the Twin Cities General Membership Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World.

The IWW is a union for all workers, dedicated to organizing on the job for better conditions today, and a world without bosses tomorrow.

You are invited to contact the Branch Secretary-Treasurer or any Delegate listed below for no-pressure conversations about your issues on the job.

Branch Contacts

Twin Cities IWW
P.O. Box 14111
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Tel. (612) 336-1266
email. twincities@iww.org
web. twincities.iww.org

Branch Secretary-Treasurers

Kieran Knutson
Steve Holm

Delegates

Nate Holdren nateholdren@gmail.com
Jeff Pilacinski jpila@iww.org

Editors

Errico Hedake
Bill Nelson

Policy

Stories, letters to the editors, and belly-aching can be addressed to tc-organizer@riseup.net

Unless otherwise stated, the opinions expressed are not necessarily the official position of the local branch or the union as a whole.

Many of our members are engaged in active organizing campaigns, and some use an alias, occasionally their union card number, or 'x' number. We prefer transparency over secrecy whenever possible, but will always honor requests for anonymity.



Education.
Organization.
Emancipation.

ing dock locations. I engaged delivery drivers, student and other University workers, as well as community supporters, in discussion about the strike's ups and downs while strategizing about how our collective action could later lead to solid workplace organizing.

The primary aim of any strike is to drastically diminish production at the operation being struck. A few of us identified the docks as locations where we could make the greatest impact on the University's everyday operations. Our actions at these locations forced the employer to respond to us and pressed the strike forward. Because these actions were successful, they exposed certain economic weaknesses and inspired other workers to focus their time and energy on places where the employer's business was at risk. We connected with workers interested in building effective networks across the many different work groups at the Univer-

"The primary aim of any strike is to drastically diminish production at the operation being struck..."

sity, as many strikers recognized that these networks would mean real solidarity and thus increased workplace control.

It's exciting to see workers use those experiences gained through collective action to formulate (and in many cases reformulate) their analysis of the class struggle and how organized labor fits into the mix. One of the best things I experienced during the strike was seeing someone begin at one opinion and move to another in such a short amount of time - no book, course, or training can catalyze this type of reaction like solidarity and industrial action can. For one to acknowledge and then voice their frustrations with generally-accepted labor practices such as contract negotiations, craft separations, and reliance on electoral politics...it's amazing for someone who days earlier swore by these practices. They're now enthusiastic about workplace organizing and growing solidarity across groups of workers at the University and in the education industry. Twin Cities IWWs influenced the analysis of many strikers and non-strikers alike with genuine support - financial contributions, numerous conversations with picketers, and many hours actively walking the picket lines helping to stop vehicles - the wobbles and their dedicated solidarity were a another high point of the strike.

The strike ended as many initially expected, and sadly, as many more came to expect. Like most employers, for years the University has systematically cultivated divisions among its workforce - some of which is "organized" or unionized, much of which is not. To its benefit, this employer has exploited these divisions among its workers, for even though certain groups of unionized workers claim to be united for negotiations, their clear lack of unity with other employee groups in the workplace leaves them quite vulnerable when it comes time to bargain contracts. Real gains for workers have never been won at the negotiations table or through the charity of politicians or employers - the strike's outcome made this fact painfully obvious to many. Real gains have been and will continue to be won by people organizing with others in their workplace and industry, without regard for job title or duties. Our strength as workers lies in the amount of control we have over the things

we do at work, and if we're not moving together to gain more decision-making power over how we spend our days, we'll continue to

see workers, unionized or otherwise, lose ground. Though there were very few material gains for AFSCME strikers, it should be pointed out that many at the University now recognize the significance of industrial organizing and solidarity. This collective recognition is key and will undoubtedly strengthen our resolve.

To win strikes, workers must be willing to stand together and do whatever it takes to bring production to a halt in the industry or at the location being struck. In looking back through history, the industrial strikes where workers of all crafts banded together even the face of hardships - legal threats, extreme poverty, and violence for example - were considered victories. The thing that gets lost when considering these victories is the fact that there was an incredible amount of dedicated, industrial organizing that happened before, during, and after the strikes. It typically didn't happen that tens, hundreds, or thousands of workers just walked off the job because it was the right thing to do. There was an understanding that flowed through much of the workforce about the importance of industrial solidarity and what it meant to stand together and fight, not just for the benefit of one, but for the benefit of all. This understanding came about through a great deal of difficult, but effective shop

floor organizing done over many years. There was a genuine discourse and culture around worker solidarity – so real in fact it often extended into the communities where workers lived. This discourse is almost completely absent today and it shows when it comes times for workers to stand together. In the past few decades, the labor movement has managed to turn its back on workplace organizing and the concept industrial solidarity. It is no surprise that strike after strike – the AFSCME strike included – is lost when unions put a majority of their time, resources, and energy into the political arena while intensely “protecting” the craft interests of their particular members only during negotiations.

To have won the strike, there would have to have been a great deal of workplace organizing across all employee group happening before we walked. This didn't happen, and frankly, it won't happen now that we're back at work unless workers take the initiative and do it themselves. Small workplace victories, achieved through organizing in one's immediate area or workgroup, will build this culture or discourse of solidarity throughout the workplace and ultimately the industry. It's tiring and daunting work, but most anyone you asks supports the idea of coming together for more control and decision-making power at work – that's what a union is all about – that's just not what the craft unions of today are all about. With strong solidarity networks forming across employee groups at the University, the power dynamic in the workplace will shift and the employer would have little recourse but yield to a large cross-section of its workforce.

Kieran Knutson

CWA Local 7250 • IWW IU 560

I was a supporter of the strike. I work for a large telecom in downtown Minneapolis. I am active in the IWW and CWA. I had supported the AFSCME strike 4 years ago. A small (but significant for us) group of workers, grad students, and student-workers at the U of M are members of the IWW – including some members of the AFSCME locals that were on strike.

We raised awareness of the strike by distributing support signs and buttons in our workplace, donating money to the strikers, attending the Solidarity Committee meetings, and trying to influence the strategy of the strike towards effective direct action picketing. The University is a massive decentralized operation that is

not easy to disrupt on a large scale. The IWW decided to focus on picketing at the loading docks at the request of one of our members who was an AFSCME picket captain there. We felt that effective picketing at the docks could disrupt supplies to the University and put more pressure on the Administration than the symbolic picketing and lobbying of politicians.

The strike was defeated because the union was unable to put sufficient pressure on the Administration to relent. The

demand the University settle. This is not an easy task.

Nonetheless, there are certain potential advantages as well. A huge number of working-class Minnesotans have some connection to the public university, and many of them are aware of and upset by the pay disparity between workers and Administration, and all the money that goes for stadiums, etc. University workers interact with a wide web of other workers; in the Fairview Hospital system, Team-

“Possibly most harmful were the illusions that DFL politicians, now in control of the State House and Senate, would intervene to force the University Administration's hand...”

University had made an assessment of how much chaos would be caused by the withdrawal of the AFSCME clericals, techs and medical staff. They decided it was worth it to face down this (relatively) militant group of workers – locals that are overwhelmingly women, left-led and have a proven willingness to strike (AFSCME 3800 had struck in 2003).

On the other hand AFSCME's leadership had not learned enough from the previous strike. Beyond the very positive unity of the three AFSCME locals there was no attempt to bring the other workers (organized and unorganized) out on strike. The picketing that was organized was almost all purely symbolic “honk-and-wave” style pickets and not lines aimed at physically shutting stuff down.

Possibly most harmful were the illusions that DFL politicians, now in control of the State House and Senate, would intervene to force the U Administrations hand. That these illusions were promoted by the left-wing AFSCME Strike leadership was both shameful and revealing.

The University is not like a factory where you can shut down the line and the profits instantly stop flowing. The University's resources come from student tuition, corporate & government research contracts, and State funding – none of which are immediately effected by a strike. The University also serves a different function under capitalism than just pumping out profits; its main job is to produce managers and skilled workers for the Establishment as a whole. Therefore, a strike needs to threaten class relations widely in order to affect the broad ruling elite that could

ster delivery drivers, construction workers, bus drivers, etc. Tens of thousands of students and near-by immigrant and counter-culture neighborhoods also represent potential class allies. Finally, as one rank and file AFSCME sister pointed out to me: AFSCME workers are overwhelmingly women and the University's wage offerings to this group, compared with the heavily male U Teamsters workers, reflected the continuing structural oppression of women workers. The potential exists to reinvigorate a militant women's movement around groups of workers like the AFSCME workers at the U.

The false illusions that workers can rely on politicians to do anything other than promote themselves has to be confronted head-on. The DFL, despite some of its populist trappings, is a pro-capitalist party that acts to channel working-class discontent into its lesser-evil version of Boss rule. The Democrats do not support workers struggles and would not be effective even if they did.

Our true strength comes from our ability, as workers, through direct action, to shut down parts or all of the capitalist economy. We need picket lines that physically block deliveries, “flying squads” that reach out to other groups of workers to extend the strike, a willingness to do “whatever it takes” – including break the law – to win. Labor law was written by the boss class – it is designed to make our strikes ineffective – we cannot let their law be our guide. During the great Minneapolis Teamsters Strike of 1934, the workers “papered their walls” with court injunctions and kept right on striking. And they won



For a World Without Bosses or Borders:

A Report back from Ukraine by Raphi Rechitsky.

Borders and bosses work together. Bosses rely on ‘captive’ worker populations that cannot freely travel to other places. Even better for the bosses are those workers who have crossed a border without state permission, and are therefore doubly vulnerable to pressure from bosses and the state. My family lived in the Ukraine until we emigrated in 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. I returned to the Ukraine this Summer for a research project.

By late July I found myself helping to organize a Border Camp on the other side of the country in the multiethnic area of Transcarpathia. Border Camps have often been used as a form resistance in Europe. In addition to learning more about migration issues at the camp, I also learned about local labor issues through visits to newly outsourced cheap-labor car factories in Ukraine. I also worked as a translator for a human rights delegation. Here, I had the unlikely opportunity to peek inside the state apparatus, visit border sites, border guard stations, and speak with Ukrainian asylum-official bureaucrats.

The new Ukrainian border with its EU neighbors—Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland—is being managed for two outcomes: to maximize the free flow of capital, and to restrict the freedom of movement of working class people. This is done under the twin banners of free-market rule and the ‘war on terror’. The border is supposedly equipped with the same type of new military technologies used in the U.S. All of this is intended to prevent political asylum seekers from Chechnya and Uzbekistan, and economic migrants from Ukraine and Russia, from entering the EU. However, the actual physical border thus far seems to exist more on paper than in reality; the potential for on-the-ground resistance is potent.

Hoping for future EU membership, the Ukraine has begun imprisoning those rejected at the border - including political asylum seekers - indefinitely in ‘refugee camp’ prisons with inhumane conditions. To begin addressing these issues, the Border Camp was an important event in a critical region to bridge the divide between anti-capitalists in the “east” and

“west”. Camp attendees participated in visible actions that disrupted local detention centers and business as usual in the asylum office bureaucracy, attended workshops led by refugees and young activists, and, most importantly, started many networking projects.

While these issues may seem far away from the work of our organization, it is imperative that we make the links to local struggle of immigrant workers. The “border” is now everywhere—as many of us know with the ICE raids on immigrant communities locally. For the IWW to return to organizing the immigrant population it emerged from, wobblies need to start working off the shop floor *in order* to build alliances and relationships across widening racial and cultural divide within the workplace and across industries. Locally this may start with being involved in supporting immigrant communities in response to ICE raids. Also, please be advised of the ongoing No Border Camp on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border in November—We’ll hope to have a report back in the next issue.

Pizza, Poker, and the Working Class.

A couple months ago I was at a college party in St. Paul and some activist friends of mine asked me, "Who is working class?"

I told my friends that I assumed everybody at the party was working class. They said, but no, these kids have lawyers for parents. And to that I said, well I doubt anyone here has their own employees.

About a month later I was driving an acquaintance across town. We were talking about Northeast Minneapolis, and she told me that a lot of working class people lived there. I thought, but I live in South Minneapolis, and everybody on my block is working class too!

I think Americans, even radical Americans, get stuck on this idea that to be working class you have to work on an assembly line or operate heavy machinery. So I thought I'd write an article about a wobbly perspective on class.

But first let me tell you a little bit about pizza and poker.

A couple years ago, long before my first IWW meeting, I had a job delivering pizzas at South Minneapolis's infamous Pizza Shack. I worked 6pm to 3am, three nights a week, got paid per delivery, and typically took home about \$100 a night.

The owners of the pizza joint were two old white guys. Besides not paying delivery drivers an hourly wage, they also refused to hire black workers. And unlike most pizza places where the workers take home the cancelled orders and the mistake pizzas, at Pizza Shack the owners saved them for the racist cops who frequented the store in the twilight hours. Needless to say I did not have much love for my bosses.

I had just graduated college and wasn't sure what to do with my life. My mom wanted me to attend grad school and become a professor, but I valued my freedom and didn't want to get locked into a career.

I wanted to be a musician and activist. So I got this pizza job to pay the rent and dedicated my days to the projects I enjoyed. I spent my free nights party-hopping around town, and when I was feeling irresponsible I drove out to Canterbury Park to play poker.

My poker career to this point had consisted of me gradually blowing all my college loans. But one night in the summer of 2005, a couple poker concepts finally clicked for me.

The first night I came home up only \$40, but I could tell that my play had improved. I went back the next day and won \$300.

My poker run lasted two weeks. I would drive to the casino whenever I felt like it, play for a few hours, and come back with at least one new hundred-dollar bill. I kept the hundreds under the television in my room and blew the rest. At the end of two weeks, I had \$1600 under my television and had won on ten consecutive trips to the casino.

Three times in a row could have been luck. Five times even. But ten times? Had to be skill. I could play poker whenever I wanted and make as much money as I needed. I was never going to have to work again.

It was like a having a weight lifted off my shoulders, a weight that I hadn't even known was there. For the second week of my run I had no worries and felt like I could handle anything. I smiled more, flirted more, and felt like I was the life of the party wherever I went.

And it wasn't just the money. If I wanted a higher paycheck I could go to grad school and become a professor. No, it was the freedom.

I had escaped the wage system. I was never going to have to take orders from a boss again. I was going to keep my own hours, pay my own salary. The next time the racist owners of Pizza Shack sent me 60 blocks to deliver a \$10 pizza, I would tell them to deliver it themselves.

Luckily I didn't quit my job, because my poker run ended just as quickly as it had begun. Over the next week most of my winnings disappeared, and I spent the rest of them on a van for my band. So much for professional gambling.

But I'm glad I experienced those two weeks, because they gave me a taste of what it's like to live life with no prospect of ever having to work again. I felt a freedom I had never known. And to me that freedom is the difference between working class and employing class.

I don't think I'm abnormal for seeking escape in the world of gambling. That's why we have the lottery. And for one cashier/cook/clerk in a million, that gam-

ble pays dividends. But on the whole, the logic of capitalism says that you're either a boss or you work for one.

Class is not the size of your paycheck. It's not what you look like, it's not your parents, and it's not where you work. Class is a relationship between a worker and an employer. Working class means you work for someone else, and employing class means someone else works for you.

It's natural to try to flee the system. Oppression sucks. So we have gambling, we have theft, black markets, etc. But these are false avenues of escape. Running will never change anything.

Capitalism is an economic system of class oppression. And the only way to fight oppression is to organize the oppressed. That's why wobblies dedicate themselves to union organizing, and that's why we sacrifice our time and career paths to building the One Big Union.

Of course, the pizza and poker story is only one way to illustrate this point. You could arrive at the same conclusion by wading through volumes of political economic theory. But why waste time on dead dude academics when there is organizing to do?

-Mike Pudd'nhead

Direct Action Reports.

Twin Cities- Childcare workers began to organize in response to the unjust firing of two of their members. Cooperating with parents, they confronted the board of the center, and put the bosses on the ropes for a week. Things have calmed down in the last week, with some workers leaving the center for better opportunities, but a pro-organizational sentiment now prevails among remaining workers.

Twin Cities - Student workers at a Minnesota university have begun organizing against higher wages. They aren't sure if they want to join a 'union' or go it alone, but action is afoot.

Pittsburgh - A grocery store was undergoing remodeling. Welding was being performed during shop hours and the resulting smoke filled the store. Rather than waiting it out and inhaling the fumes, the retail workers walked out., informing management they would return when the fumes dissipated

Education for Emancipation.

The Work People's College is a project of the Twin Cities IWW, dedicated to providing free, radical, and practical education to working people, focussing on history, culture, theory, and practical organizing.

The upcoming winter session will feature two courses. Fellow Worker Steve Holm will facilitate *Chomsky 101: An Introduction to Noam Chomsky's Life and Political Thought*. This 6-part class will introduce participants to the thinking and writing of one of America's preeminent dissidents. The class will cover themes including Media and Propaganda; U.S imperialism around the world; and the anarchist alternative through short readings and group discussion.

Fellow Worker Jeff Pilacinski will present *Coup de Sabots and the Creativity of Direct Action*. Using Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's definitions of "Sabotage" and "Direct Action", the course will examine the history behind everyday forms of resistance, while

empowering each other with practical methods of increasing workers' control on and off the job.

This class will incorporate a number of different learning methods, including: participant presentations, small group discussions, role plays, short participant compositions, video screenings, reading assignments, and some lecture.

To register for classes, call 612 -339-1266 or send an email to twincities@iww.org. Include your name,

contact information, and the class for which you are registering.

Chomsky 101 meets Saturdays
November 17th - December 22nd 2007
11:00 am - 1:00 pm
Downtown Minneapolis Public Library
4th Floor, Conference Room N-402

Coup de Sabots meets Thursday evenings
November 29th - January 3rd 2008
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm
Pierre Bottineau Library
55 Broadway Ave NE, Minneapolis

WPC Graduates show off diplomas.



The Organizer

Twin Cities IWW

P.O. Box 14111

Minneapolis, MN 55414

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

